

**Macedonia.** Supporting Macedonia's integration into NATO and the EU remains a vital element in our efforts to promote peace and stability in the Balkan region. Macedonia has met nearly all of the technical reform benchmarks set by the EU, and the European Commission has recommended setting a start date for accession negotiations. We also commend Macedonia and Kosovo on completing the demarcation of their mutual border in October of last year and on establishing formal diplomatic relations. This is a major step for regional stability. Macedonia is an active participant in NATO's Partnership for Peace and Membership Action Plan. It is also one of the highest per capita troop contributors to ISAF. Macedonia's troop commitments are a reflection of the substantial progress the country has made in recent years in meeting NATO's standards in the defense sector.

To maintain this positive momentum, there are further steps we encourage Macedonia to take. We encourage the Macedonian government to prioritize improving inter-ethnic relations by continuing to implement both the letter and spirit of the Ohrid Framework Agreement. In addition, Macedonia must continue to focus on reforms, particularly in the area of rule of law.

Most crucially, the ongoing name dispute with Greece must be resolved as soon as possible. The United States strongly supports the ongoing UN negotiation efforts, led by Matthew Nimetz. We will embrace any mutually acceptable solution that emerges from the negotiations, but there must be a solution and soon. Active, constructive engagement between Athens and Skopje is vital to any positive outcome. We are encouraged by bilateral contacts at the highest levels in recent months to build confidence and to make progress on this issue. The dispute continues to impede Macedonia's integration into NATO and the EU and is therefore a potential threat to the stability of the whole region. In the interests of both countries and indeed of the entire region, leaders in both Macedonia and Greece must now take bold and decisive action to resolve this issue once and for all.